

For Publication

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority  
Executive Committee  
22 January 2024

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**SUBJECT:** HMICFRS Action Plan Update

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Background Papers: None

**Implications:**

Implications	Yes/No	Impact/Reference
Financial	Yes	Fire and Rescue Services receive no additional funding for the additional workload placed by an HMICFRS visit, including preparation for and resourcing of an inspection team. Items within the action plan that require additional funding will be managed through the annual budget bidding process
Risk Management	Yes	This Service has built an effective relationship with HMICFRS. BFRS's one cause of concern was addressed prior to the publication of the report so presents no current risks. Progress against the action plan will be managed via the Project Management Office and leadership team meetings with oversight and scrutiny provided by the FRA.
Legal	Yes	The current Fire and Rescue Service National Framework issued under section 21 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, to which the Authority must have regard when carrying out its functions, states as follows at paragraph 7.5: 'Fire and Rescue Authorities must give due regard to reports and recommendations made by HMICFRS and – if recommendations are

		made – <b>prepare, update and regularly publish an action plan detailing how the recommendations are being actioned.</b> If the Fire and Rescue Authority does not propose to undertake any action as a result of a recommendation, reasons for this should be given.’[emphasis added] It continues: ‘When forming an action plan, the Fire and Rescue Authority could seek advice and support from other organisations, for example, the National Fire Chiefs Council and the Local Government Association’
Privacy and Security	No	There are no Privacy and Security implications as part of the report.
Duty to collaborate	Yes	The Policing and Crime Act 2017 requires the Authority to consider opportunities for collaboration with the police and ambulance services
Health and Safety	No	Health and safety performance implications are discussed at the Health and Safety Steering Group. Any serious implications for staff and third parties will be reviewed by the Health and Safety Manager and reported to Members.
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	Yes	Where performance affects people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, we will give due regard to the public sector equality duty. A People Impact Assessment (PIA) is produced for all Projects, Strategies and public events. The purpose of a PIA is to support consideration of equality and diversity issues in the design, development and delivery of activity, change, projects, procedures, guidance and technical notes across the Service
Environmental Sustainability	No	There are no Environmental Sustainability implications as part of the report.
Consultation & Communication	Yes	See the comments in the legal section above.

## PURPOSE

To present Members with an update on the progress made against the Service HMICFRS Action Plan that addressed the Areas for Improvement identified by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in their 2023 service inspection report.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that members acknowledge progress made to date against the action plan.

### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 For over 160 years, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary independently inspected and reported on the efficiency and effectiveness of police forces in the public interest. In summer 2017, HMIC took on inspections of England's fire and rescue services, inspecting and reporting on their efficiency, effectiveness and people. To reflect this new role, their name changed to HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS).
- 1.2 HMICFRS provide Fire Services with graded judgements across 11 diagnostic areas. The expected graded judgement is 'good' which is one of 5 possible grades:
- Outstanding – The FRS has substantially exceeded the characteristics of good performance;
  - Good – The FRS has substantially demonstrated all the characteristics of good performance;
  - Adequate – The FRS has demonstrated some of the characteristics of good performance, but we have identified areas where the FRS should make improvements;
  - Requires improvement – The FRS has demonstrated few, if any, of the characteristics of good performance, and we have identified a substantial number of areas where the FRS needs to make improvements; and
  - Inadequate – We have causes for concern and have made recommendations to the FRS to address them.
- 1.3 HMICFRS's first full inspection of Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service was in 2018. In 2020 they carried out an inspection specifically on our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021 they conducted their second full inspection, this was followed by our most recent full inspection in February and March of 2023.

1.4 In August 2023 HMICFRS published their 2023 inspection report on Effectiveness, Efficiency and People for Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service. The following graded judgements were given:

Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
	Understanding fire and risk	Responding to major incidents	Preventing fire and risk	
	Future affordability	Right people, right skills	Public safety through fire regulation	
		Promoting fairness and diversity	Responding to fires and emergencies	
		Managing performance and developing leaders	Best use of resources	
			Promoting values and culture	

1.5 In addition to a narrative and graded judgement for each area HMICFRS issue recommendations when necessary in the form of 'Areas for Improvement' (AFI). The Service has produced an action plan setting out how the Service will address these Areas for Improvement set out in the 2023 report. For more serious concerns HMICFRS can issue a 'Cause for Concern'. Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service received one cause for concern in relation to Fire Fighter fitness testing. The Service

developed a separate action plan to address the cause for concern. This paper provides an update on the progress made against the Cause for Concern and the Areas for Improvement.

## 2 2023 Areas for Improvement

2.1 The Areas for Improvement are summarised in the table below:

Area	Area for Improvement
<b>Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies</b>	None identified
<b>Preventing Fire and other Risks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service should develop a clear prevention plan that implements the prevention strategy in its community risk management plan. The prevention plan should target people most at risk and make sure the level of activity is proportionate to reduce that risk.</li> <li>• The service should make sure it targets its prevention work at people most at risk.</li> <li>• The service should make sure its quality assures its prevention activity, so staff carry out safe and well visits and home fire safety visits to an appropriate standard.</li> </ul>
<b>Protecting the public through fire regulation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service should assure itself that it has effective systems and processes in place to manage its risk-based inspection programme.</li> <li>• The service should make sure it has an effective quality assurance process, so staff carry out audits to an appropriate standard.</li> <li>• The service should have effective processes to manage the burden of false alarms (unwanted fire signals).</li> <li>• The service should make sure it works with local businesses and other organisations to share information and expectations on compliance with fire safety regulations.</li> </ul>

<b>Responding to fires and other emergencies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service should make sure its response strategy provides the most appropriate response for the public in line with its community risk management plan.</li> <li>• The service should make sure fire control is sufficiently resourced and has resilience arrangements and appropriate fallback cover.</li> <li>• The service should make sure it uses its on-call crews effectively to respond to incidents based on risk in line with its community risk management plan.</li> <li>• The service should do more to align with national operational guidance to improve a co-ordinated response to the most high-risk incidents.</li> <li>• The service should make sure it has an effective system for learning from operational incidents and assure itself that all areas of the service can contribute to debriefs.</li> </ul>
<b>Responding to major and multi agency incidents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service should make sure it has an effective method to simultaneously share fire survival guidance information with multiple callers and that it has a dedicated communication link in place.</li> <li>• The service should make sure it has an overarching cross-border exercise strategy. The strategy should assure the service that exercise objectives are in line with community risk management plan risks and that learning is recorded, shared and actioned.</li> </ul>
<b>Making best use of resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service needs to show a clear rationale for the allocation of resources between prevention, protection and response activities. This should reflect, and be consistent with, the risks and priorities set out in its community risk management plan.</li> <li>• The service should have effective measures in place to assure itself that its workforce is productive and that its time is used as efficiently and effectively as possible to meet the priorities in the community risk management plan.</li> <li>• The service should assure itself that all processes in place to support performance management are effective.</li> </ul>
<b>Making the fire &amp; rescue service</b>	<p>None identified</p>

<b>affordable now and in the future</b>	
<b>Promoting the right values and culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No Areas for Improvement were given. However, the following Cause of Concern was given, 'The Service cannot assure itself that its operational members of staff meet the minimum fitness requirements to perform their roles'</li> </ul>
<b>Getting the right people with the right skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service should review its succession planning to make sure that it has effective arrangements in place to manage staff turnover while continuing to provide its core service to the public.</li> <li>• The service should assure itself that on-call firefighters are appropriately supported in their initial development.</li> </ul>
<b>Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service should make sure it has effective grievance procedures. It should identify and put in place ways to improve staff confidence in those procedures.</li> <li>• The service should have a consistent plan to promote positive action with under-represented groups and make sure staff understand the purpose and benefits of a diverse workforce.</li> </ul>
<b>Managing performance and developing leaders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service should ensure it has arrangements in place to identify, develop and support all high-potential staff across the organisation.</li> </ul>

2.2 Appendix 1 is the Service HMICFRS Action Plan with updates on progress that will be supplemented by verbal updates from the Principal Officer Team.

2.3 The action plan is being managed as part of the Project Management Office (PMO), with regular reporting into the Chief Fire Officer and the leadership team. The Authority will be kept informed of progress in delivering against the HMICFRS Action Plan via regular reporting to both the Executive Committee and full Authority.

### 3 Cause of Concern

3.1 A Cause of Concern was issued under 'Promoting the right values and culture'. The cause was as follows:

'Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service can't assure itself that its operational members of staff meet the minimum fitness requirements to perform their roles.'

3.2 Under this cause for concern HMICFRS made the following recommendation: 'Within 28 days, the service should provide an action plan that details how it intends to make sure all staff meet the minimum fitness requirements.'

3.3 The Service has a fitness policy which requires all firefighters to pass a fitness test on appointment and annually thereafter or after an absence from work of 28 days or more. In the last inspection, the Service provided fitness data which showed that, in 2022/23, only 3 per cent of firefighters had completed their annual fitness test. This was due to a backlog of fitness tests caused by the intentional suspension of annual fitness testing during the COVID pandemic. Since then, the Service has utilised an external provider to address the backlog of fitness tests.

3.4 An action plan was already in place to address the backlog before the anticipated publication of the report. At no time, was a firefighter allowed to ride a fire appliance without first having undertaken a fitness test. It was simply that some staff had not undertaken one within the previous 12 months and the Service had not fully caught up with the backlog.

3.5 The Service produced an action plan addressing the cause for concern which was submitted to HMICFRS within the required time frame. A reinspection specific to the cause of concern was conducted by HMICFRS between the 27 November and the 1 December 2023. The reinspection consisted of:

- Chief Fire Officer briefing
- Document Review (Including the action plan and the fitness testing policy)
- Data Review

- Desk Top Review of fitness testing records with the Occupational Health Manager
  - Head of HR Interview
  - Service Fitness Adviser and Health and Safety Adviser Interview
  - Reality Testing interview with Service Physical Training Instructor's (PTI's)
- 3.6 The Service was able to demonstrate to HMICFRS that it is now up to date with its fitness testing and has plans in place that will ensure that there is sufficient testing capacity and resilience to ensure that the fitness testing programme will continue to be delivered at the required rate in 2024 and beyond.
- 3.7 In meeting between CFO Andrew Hopkinson and HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services Roy Wilsher it was confirmed that the cause for concern will be discharged by HMICFRS. A draft letter outlining the inspection teams findings from the reinspection was shared with the Service for factual accuracy checks on 2 January 2024. The Service reviewed and sent a small number of proposed corrections back to HMICFRS by their deadline of 5 January 2024. At the time of writing this paper HMICFRS are in the process of reviewing our feedback and making final pre-publication checks. Protocol around the publication of HMICFRS inspection reports and letters prevents us from sharing the detailed findings set out in the draft letter with Members at this stage. HMICFRS have yet to commit to a publication date for the letter which will be publish on its website.

#### 4 Summery

- 4.1 This report along with Appendix 1 and the verbal updates provided to Members demonstrates the progress made by the Service against the Areas for Improvement identified in the most recent HMICFRS report.

**JOHN-JOE PEKSZYC**  
**HEAD OF STRATEGIC SUPPORT AND ASSET MANAGEMENT**

